

INSIDE

TRACKS

QUESTIONS ON KOOCANUSA

At the height of the kokanee fishery in 1985 Lake Koocanusa, or Libby Reservoir, supported over 100,000 angler days and a harvest of one-half million salmon. The kokanee became established in the reservoir in about 1980, the result of fry escaping from a hatchery upstream in Canada. A good trout fishery was present in addition to the kokanee fishery.

In recent years, kokanee size has dropped, and trout catches are almost nil. Most biologists and anglers agree on the causes of the decline, but debate the solutions.

According to fisheries manager Jim Vashro, the decline in the kokanee fishery is directly related to productivity of the reservoir.



ASSISTANT HATCHERY MANAGER GEORGE KIRSCH WITH KAMLOOPS TROUT AT MURRAY SPRINGS HATCHERY



LAKE KOOCANUSA, OR LIBBY RESERVOIR

"When the reservoir first filled productivity was high partly because the flooded soils released nutrients into the water and because of a fertilizer plant upstream," said Vashro. "Then the plant upstream in Canada was shut down, decreasing nutrient supplies to only a few percent of previous levels. Deep draw-downs flushed nutrients out of the system. What we see now is indicative of the long-term productivity of the reservoir."

Biologists contend that the kokanee outstripped their diminishing food supply as their population expanded. Peamouth chub also competed for the kokanee's food (small "zooplankton" or water fleas). Many feel that rainbow and cutthroat trout declined because of competition with kokanee and habitat factors.

Fisheries managers have outlined a program to improve the Koocanusa fishery. The strategies include:

- Increase kokanee size by reducing numbers. Methods include increased harvest and blocking of spawning streams in Canada.
- Establish a trophy kamloops rainbow fishery to increase fishing opportunity. These predators could also help reduce the numbers of kokanee and increase kokanee size.

• Reestablish a strong trout fishery by planting two-year old cutthroat; if cutthroat are not successful, plant a strain of rainbow trout.

• Improve reservoir habitat by securing better reservoir levels through the northwest Power Planning Council.

Angler groups agree with most of these strategies. But some offer alternative solutions.

"We've lost a lot of people who used to come to Koocanusa from Missoula, Spokane and other areas to fish for kokanee," said Jeff Arneson, owner of Green Mountain Sports in Eureka. "The kokanee fishery was good this year, but those people from outside the area didn't hear about it in time."

Arneson believes that lake fertilization, a method being tried in Kootenai Lakes in Canada, might work in Koocanusa. "The kokanee might have grown better this year because of the high water flushing more nutrients into the reservoir," he said. "We could use fertilization in years of low nutrient flushes." Arnesson conceded that fertilization is expensive and that results in Canada have been less than promising.

"We also need a successful predator fish to thin down the kokanee and

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QUESTIONS ON KOOCANUSA (continued)

provide a trophy fishery," said Arneson. "I haven't seen much results from the kamloops--I think the kamloops plants need to be stepped up if they are going to work. Also, I'd be open to trying another big fish like chinook salmon."

Most biologists agree that the success of kamloops in the reservoir remains uncertain. Department biologist Joe Huston believes that the kamloops should be raised to 12 inches in the hatchery before release, to decrease the high mortality of the first year of life. George Kirsch, assistant manager at Murray Springs Hatchery, feels that the genetics of the kamloops stock at the hatchery may need improvement.

Vashro agrees that Kamloops have been slow in appearing but notes it takes 5 - 7 years for them to mature and anglers have to learn how to catch them. "We don't want to introduce too many predators", he said. "They could literally eat all the salmon, and no one wants that." Vashro also noted that Canada and Idaho may not be agreeable to planting chinook salmon.

Arneson echoes the comment of many sportsmen on the cutthroat trout plants which have produced very little in the reservoir. "Cutthroat have been a dead horse from the start, and they're still a dead horse. The sooner the Department scraps that program, the better. I'd rather see rainbow trout or something else as a production fishery."

Nick Carvey, president of the Tobacco Valley Rod and Gun Club, wants to see something done for bull trout and ling in the reservoir. "Bull trout numbers are down, down, down. Our club suggested closing some of the best spawning tributaries to angling to help spawners, and those closures got included in the regulations. We also asked for an angling closure on ling during their spawning season in February.

Hilmar Hansen of the Libby Rod and Gun Club points to reservoir drawdown as a major problem. "The fish would probably grow better with better reservoir levels, but the Army Corps of Engineers and Bonneville Power Administration are running the dam

the way they want to," said Hanson. "How are you going to beat the system?"

Department biologist Don Skaar and his crew have studied the reservoir and the Kootenai River fisheries. Skaar will soon begin writing a mitigation plan to offset the effects of dam operation on the fisheries. The plan will be submitted the Northwest Power Planning Council within the next two years.

"We can't make recommendations for operation of the dam unless we consider the reservoir and the river system," said Skaar. "That means working with British Columbia, Idaho and several Tribes. We will go to the Power Planning Council with a joint plan which will include changes in dam operations and other fisheries improvement steps."

At present, the outcome of fisheries management actions on Lake Koocanusa remains uncertain. Will kamloops grow to a trophy size by eating kokanee? Will kokanee sizes and numbers continue to fluctuate? Will rainbow or cutthroat produce a "bread and butter" fishery? Will mitigation plans submitted to the Northwest Power Planning Council be successful?

"We are transferring a fisheries biologist to Libby, and our efforts will continue to increase on the reservoir and river," said Vashro. "We will involve the public fully as we move forward with management and mitigation efforts. We have a high regard for the fisheries in that area."

INTERVIEW: GREG BARKUS

Commissioner Greg Barkus is the manager of the investment firm D.A. Davidson and Company in Kalispell. He is an intense and hardworking man, but known as a hands-off leader. People who have watched him believe he brings a flair for analysis and careful decision making to the Fish Wildlife and Parks Commission, of which he is vice chairman. We interviewed Barkus recently in his office.

Editor: How did you happen to be appointed to the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission?



GREG BARKUS

Barkus: The Governor asked for assistance in his administration. There was an opening on the Commission, which had always interested me. I gladly accepted the appointment. I think most Montanans have a deep concern for our fishing and hunting heritage. It touches all of us in one way or the other.

Editor: What is your background relative to hunting and fishing issues?

Barkus: I've hunted and fished all my life, so I think I bring an understanding of sportsmen's issues to the Commission. I've hunted deer and elk from the Bearpaws to the Beartooths to the South Fork of the Flathead. I'm an avid bird hunter, and I've been active in Pheasants Forever. Overall, I don't think you could classify me an avid sportsman, but as an interested one.

Editor: What have been some of the most enjoyable aspects of being commissioner?

Barkus: Seeing the quality of people in the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has been very rewarding. Their dedication and enthusiasm for the job is obvious. I never realized that government employees could be so committed.

Editor: Have you had any low points in the job?

BARKUS INTERVIEW (continued)

Barkus: I encourage hunters or anglers to call me and voice concerns. However, I'm very frustrated when people without all the facts engage in public bashing of the Department or of me as a commissioner. In general, people are very good about letting me know about something before it becomes a problem. But there have been a few exceptions.

Editor: What do you consider your major accomplishment so far as a commissioner?

Barkus: I'd like to think that I had something to do with a change in direction in the enforcement division. I've had concerns with equitable treatment of mistaken offenses, things like that. We should concentrate on education and go after the real violators.

Editor: Have you worked together well with your fellow Commissioners?

Barkus: I've developed some long term friendships. I've enjoyed the dialogue--we don't always agree of course. I believe we have a good working group and represent a good cross section of sportsman and landowner interests.

Editor: Recently, the Commission voted to temporarily ban the Grizzly hunting season in Montana. Describe the events that led to the decision.

Barkus: It was ironic, really. After just finishing a fabulous goose hunt on Saturday morning, I had to get to a farmhouse to take a conference call on the subject. Obviously, we knew what the judge had ruled so we were prepared for it. Remember that the judge was responding to a suit brought by the Fund for Animals and The Swan View Coalition. The difficulty was coming to grips with having to make a Commission decision to actually close the season. Personally, and for the sportsmen of Montana, it was really not an easy thing to do. On the other hand you must listen to legal advi-

sors. We could have been renegades and not voted to close the season, but if we did that, hunters would be subject to federal prosecution and would have been in contempt of court. Nobody was happy about it.

Editor: Any predictions on the outcome of the lawsuit that led to the judge's decision?

Barkus: In the long run, we have confidence that the Department's information on bears in the ecosystem will support the hunt if the courts allow the information to be used objectively. De-listing the bear may be the long-term solution.

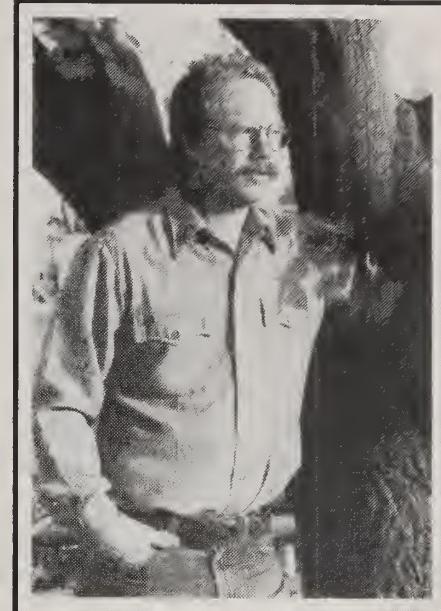
Editor: You have the reputation of being very analytical. Do you view yourself that way?

Barkus: I enjoy putting a numerical equation to a problem to see if it can help in solving it. I suppose I am analytical, partly because of my financial training. I recognize, though, that every issue has a subjective side.

Editor: Obviously, you have a deep interest in fish and wildlife issues. What else gets you going?

Barkus: Of course, my wife Kathy and my children Angie, Ken and Jill. My job is very important to me. And politics, from local to national. -- It's a burning interest.

EMPLOYEE NEWS



Brian Marotz has been selected to fill the fisheries program officer slot, vacant since last April. Marotz has been with the Department since 1985. He worked as a fisheries biologist on projects dealing with Libby reservoir, the Kootenai River system and Hungry Horse Reservoir. He has been the Department's lead biologist in developing the Libby and Hungry Horse reservoir fisheries models.

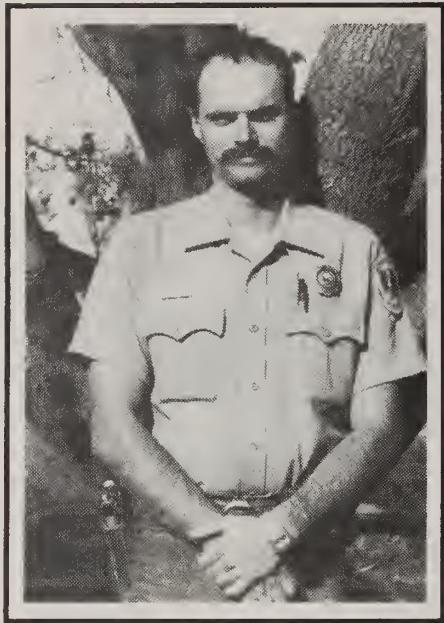
Marotz received a bachelor of science degree in biology from the University of Wisconsin at Steven's Point, and a Master of Science degree in Fisheries, from Louisiana State University. He has worked in marine and estuarine waters in addition to freshwater biology, and he is a certified fisheries scientist.

Marotz is an expert fly tyer and teaches a class on the subject at Flathead Valley Community college. He is an addicted hunter and angler. He lives in Kalispell with his wife, Julie and children, Terra and Nathan.

TIP-MONT Line 1-800-847-6668

The Department's toll-free hotline for reporting property damage and violations of fish and game laws is in operation for this fall's hunting season. TIP-MONT is the acronym for Turn In Poacher's Montana.

Anyone who witnesses a fish and game violation, or property vandalism is encouraged to report the crime by calling 1-800-TIP-MONT (1-800-847-6668). Callers will remain anonymous and may be eligible for a cash reward.



PROFILE: BRIAN SOMMERS

Brian Sommers operates in one of the busiest warden districts in Montana. As one warden put it: "very few people keep up with Brian." Other wardens use words like "committed" and "organized" to describe him.

Sommers has been the warden for the area west of Kalispell since July, 1987. He had graduated from the University of Montana in Wildlife Biology in 1986, and gained experience as a warden in Missoula, Billings and Shelby.

As a warden trainee in Missoula, Sommers learned a valuable lesson. "I was trying to be smart and sneak up on some fishermen on the other side of the river," said Sommers. "I'd always driven over these railroad tracks in my dad's pickup. But when I tried to drive over the crossing in my state pickup, I got high-centered. So I got in a panic and started jacking up the truck and putting things under the wheels.

"Finally I realized I better get on the radio and call Burlington Northern to warn them. Sure enough, they had a train heading in my direction. Then I really got in a panic and finally got my truck off the tracks, just as the train came around the corner. The train had slowed way down, and the people on the train were all laughing and waving as they went by."

When Sommers was transferred to Shelby, he stepped directly into a tense situation. "I was still living in the motel. I hadn't even found a place to live yet. A rancher called me in the middle of the night and said he caught three guys coming out of his field with some deer.

"When I got there, the rancher rode up on his horse and led me to the violators. He had put the bucket of his front end loader on the hood of their pickup, so they were stuck. They had four untagged deer, three were big muley bucks, and they didn't have permission to hunt on the rancher's land. They had cut two fences. I ended putting all three of the guys in jail.

The next day I confiscated some other illegally taken animals. So in only two days I was driving around town with a truckload of deer."

Although he hasn't been around as long as many of the wardens in Region One, he has become an integral part of the operation. "We realize how important Brian is when he's gone for a week," said warden captain Ed Kelly.

Sommers' philosophy on enforcement reflects the Department's emphasis on educating people. "I try to be fair to people," said Sommers. "I'm not into a ticket game. You can always write a lot of tickets, but I'm not sure how much is gained by it."

One of the most disturbing cases that Sommers has been involved with was the juvenile poaching ring which operated a few years ago west of Kalispell. "I interviewed 10 kids on the case," said Sommers. "I determined that at least 15 deer were killed during the shooting spree. They were shooting at the deer with a .22, sometimes up to 200 yards, so they probably wounded many more."

One night, Somers had a check station set up near Kila. "Two kids came through with blood in the back of their truck" said Sommers. "Finally, I got them to admit they had shot a buck and not tagged it. Supposedly, the deer was staggering around in the road and charged their truck so they shot it in self-defense. They claimed the deer had an enlarged heart, which explained its odd

behavior. That was one of the best stories I've heard. I told them I wanted to see that heart, but they had already eaten most of it."

Of all the work he's done, Sommers most enjoys patrolling during antelope season. Each fall, he contributes a week to the effort. "Antelope hunting brings out the most interesting parts of the human character," said Sommers. "Lot's of times, hunters shoot antelope for others, transfer tags and shoot too many antelope. It can get pretty wild."

"Once, from a bluff, I saw a guy shoot two antelope. Then right below me I saw a guy in a pickup chasing four antelope at full speed coming out of a coulee. I thought that I'd better catch up with him to tell him not to do that. By the time reached him he was driving away from a fence where a huge buck lay dead. When I saw him he stopped. I asked him about the antelope and he said it was his dad's and pointed in the distance to the man I'd seen shoot two other antelope. I knew that the kid must have shot the buck."

"We began driving over to talk to his dad and on the way, the kid jumped out of his truck and shot another antelope. While he was gutting that one out, I began walking over to his dad and I could see the man rushing to get his tags out of his pocket and running to the two antelope he had shot to tag them before I got there. I yelled for him to stop and called another warden on the radio for assistance. There were dead antelope all over the prairie."

"When the area warden got there, I found out he had already checked the man and his kid that morning. The father had killed one antelope that morning and the kid had killed two. They were using Grandpa's and his girlfriend's tags, who were driving around in a Scout and taking the animals back to camp. To top it off, they were hunting on private land and without permission. It took hours to sort that one all out."

Sommers' fascination with antelope hunters is not just based on violators. "I love to work antelope hunters, even if they do nothing wrong, because in that open

country you can see everything."

One day some people were watching some antelope out in this field, a long way out, and I saw a huge buck walk across the field within 60 yards of their pickup. The buck stopped, looked at them, walked a little ways, stopped and looked at them again. When they finally saw the buck he had just slipped under a fence into a cow pasture where they couldn't shoot."

Sommers credits his wife, Shannon, for making it possible to operate the way he does. "She keeps me going," he aid. "She takes messages at all hours. And it's nice having her check up on me in the middle of the night to make sure I'm ok."

Since coming to Kalispell, Sommers has gotten more involved in the hunter safety program. "I really like working with the kids," he said. "That's where developing a good hunting ethic is important."

Sommers is a man who genuinely enjoys his job. "When I was going to college in Missoula, I transferred to the University of Idaho for a short time to try the recreation management field," he said. "I found out that being a warden was what I really wanted to do. I'm excited to be here."

HUNGRY? Try Best Beast Stew ... simple, but delicious

INGREDIENTS:

- One chunk of deer, elk or other big game -- 1/3 lb. per person
- Two cups cubed potatoes
- Two cups cubed carrots
- 1/2 cup chopped cabbage
- 1/2 cup chopped celery
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- Pepper, salt
- One can cream of mushroom soup,
- Three cups water

DIRECTIONS: Place all ingredients in a crock pot; cook on low for 6 - 8 hours. Serve with biscuits and a warm cozy fire.

PROJECT WILD: VOLUNTEERS MAKE IT HAPPEN

Kari Gunderson, Joe Flood and Lynn Kelly teach teachers about wildlife. They are Project WILD Facilitators. Through their efforts, hundreds of elementary and secondary level teachers learn to present to their students educational units about land, air and aquatic wildlife and habitat.

The program reaches thousands of students each year, and stands as one of the premier environmental education efforts in Montana. Congratulations to Lynn, Kari and Joe and all the other facilitators for making a difference with Montana youth.



KARI GUNDERSON, JOE FLOOD, LYNN KELLY



MORE EMPLOYEE NEWS CASEY WINS AWARD

Wildlife biologist Dan Casey received a special award of excellence from the U.S. Forest Service for his work on a cooperative elk habitat improvement project on Firefighter Mountain. Casey helped design timber cutting and burning techniques to encourage the growth of plant used by elk for food.

The Department's goal for the Firefighter project is to increase the elk herd by one-third. The improvements will also help other species such as white-tailed and mule deer, moose, black bear and grizzly bear.



NOEMI BARTA

Noemi Barta has been hired to fill the administrative aide position. Barta will divide her time between public contacts at our front desk and word processing duties.

Barta has lived in Montana for 13 years and has worked for the Missoula County High School system and the State Crime Lab. She and her husband, Lee, met in Nicaragua where they both worked at the U.S. Embassy.

Barta enjoys reading, race walking and keeping fit. She live in Kalispell with her husband, who works out with her every morning before work. They have two children, Sondra and James, who are away at college.

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**FOR A FREE SUBSCRIPTION
WRITE TO:**

INSIDE TRACKS

490 Meridian Road
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406-752-5501

HUNTERS: Remember the following. . .

- Validate and attach tag immediately upon kill of big game animal
- Don't transfer tags
- It is illegal to shoot game animals from a vehicle.
- Don't shoot from a public highway or road shoulder.
- You must stop at all check stations, even if you don't have any game.
- Obtain permission from landowners before big game hunting on private land
- Wear at least 400 square inches of hunter orange above the waist.

HAVE A SAFE AND ENJOYABLE HUNT!

VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS: Volunteers have contributed 1,597 hours since the Regional volunteer program began last spring. Would you like to get involved in the Department as a volunteer? Contact Betty Johnson, Volunteer Coordinator at 752-5501.

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